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BUCHENWALD CAMP

The Report of a Parliamentary Delegation

Presented by the Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister of Defence, to Parliament by Command of His Majesty
April 1945

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The Members of the Delegation were :—

House of Lords : Earl Stanhope and Lord Addison.

House of Commons : Colonel Wickham, Sir Archibald Southby, Mrs. Tate, Mr. Ness Edwards, Mr. Silverman, Mr. Graham White, Sir Henry Morris-Jones, Mr. Driberg.

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The Report of a Parliamentary Delegation

1. On 19th April, 1945, in the course of a statement in the House of Commons on the German concentration camps, the Prime Minister said:—

> "I have this morning received an informal message from General Eisenhower saying that the new discoveries, particularly at Weimar, far surpass anything previously exposed. He invites me to send a body of Members of Parliament at once to his Headquarters in order that they may themselves have ocular and first-hand proof of these atrocities. The matter is of urgency. . . . I have come to the conclusion that eight Members of this House and two Members of the House of Lords should form a Parliamentary Delegation, and should travel out at once to the Supreme Headquarters. . . . Photographs will be shown of the Members in these gruesome scenes. . . . The object of this visit is to find out the truth. . . ." (Official Report, Cols. 390-391.)

Many Members of both Houses at once volunteered to serve on this delegation. The Leader of the House of Lords and the Speaker selected four Members of the Conservative Party, three Members of the Labour Party, one Liberal, one Liberal National, and one Independent.

2. Our terms of reference were clearly not those of a judicial commission of enquiry or to investigate Nazi atrocities generally. Such a process might have taken many weeks or even months, and would have required a staff of official clerks and interpreters. Our object was "to find out the truth," while the evidence was still fresh, at this important camp—the first of the main concentration camps of Nazi Germany to be overrun by British or American forces—and so to test the accuracy of the reports already published. We therefore determined to exclude from our report statements of which no material evidence was still visible. It may be noted that our delegation included one woman, two doctors of medicine, and one solicitor, a member of the Jewish race; and that, while at least two of our number understood German sufficiently well to be able to converse in it fluently with internees, there was in fact no difficulty of communication, since among the men from almost every European nation present in the camp there were many who spoke English. Though our visit was brief, the time originally scheduled for it was extended by several hours, and we had ample opportunity of accumulating data. A number of photographs were taken in our presence, and these are available for publication.

3. We left London by air on the afternoon of Friday, April 20th. We should like to pay tribute to the efficiency and care with which the arrangements for our flights were handled by the officers of Transport Command and by the crews of the Dakotas in which we flew; and to the staff of S.H.A.E.F., both American and British, and others concerned with the organisation of our visit—not an easy task in a forward operational area. On arrival in France (where we spent the Friday night), we were greeted and hospitably entertained by General Eisenhower and his staff. We proceeded by air to Weimar on the following morning, arriving at Buchenwald Camp at about 11 a.m. on Saturday, April 21st.

4. Buchenwald Camp is set in hilly, well-wooded country about 15 minutes' drive from Weimar. It dates from 1934. It is badly laid out, on sloping uneven ground. The walls and paths are ill kept; at the time of our visit

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they were covered with dust, which blew about in the wind, and in wet weather the camp must be deep in mud. The ordinary huts of the camp are roughly constructed of wood, with earth floors, without windows or sanitation. (Latrines consist of poles suspended over trenches.) There are also some more solidly built brick blocks, of two storeys. Over the main gate of the camp is the inscription " *Recht oder unrecht—mein Vaterland* " (My country right or wrong).

5. The size of the camp is indicated by the fact that its maximum capacity was said to have been 120,000. On 1st April last the number in camp was 80,813. A few days before the arrival of the American forces (11th April), the Nazis removed a large number of prisoners, variously estimated at from 18,000 to 22,000. Some of those whom they wished to remove (because " they knew too much ") were able to hide from them. It was impossible to form any accurate estimate of the percentages of various nationalities still remaining in the camp; we met many Jews and non-Jewish Germans, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, French, Belgians, Russians and others. A detailed report presented to us by representatives of an anti-Fascist committee stated that, up to 1st April, the total number of those who had died or been killed at Buchenwald, or immediately on removal therefrom to subsidiary " extermination-camps," was 51,572—at least 17,000 of them since 1st January, 1945. The camp has now been thrown open, and a certain number of its inmates must have left independently. Detailed camp records, including nominal rolls, were left behind by the Nazis; but, at the time of our visit, it had not been possible to start drawing up rolls of those still in the camp, the American medical and sanitary authorities being naturally preoccupied with the cleaning of the camp (a task performed partly by German civilians from the neighbourhood, parties of whom are also brought daily to see what had been done in their name and in their midst), and with problems of feeding and medical attention.

6. Although the inmates of the camp are commonly referred to as " prisoners," they should not be confused with military Prisoners of War. They were in three main categories: (*a*) political internees and Jews from Germany itself; (*b*) as the Third Reich expanded, political internees and Jews from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc.; (*c*) from 1940 onwards, men and youths imported for forced labour from the various occupied countries. There were few Britons at any time in the camp; one estimate was " a few dozen." Almost all of these were civilians. We were told of one French parachutist, Lieutenant Maurice Pertschuk, who was taken prisoner in 1943, transferred in civilian clothes from Compiégne to Buchenwald, and there hanged, shortly before the United States troops arrived. We also obtained a document, signed by Squadron-Leader F. Yeo-Thomas, Captain Harry Poole, and Lieut. Stephane Hessel (of the French War Ministry), testifying to the fact that they were saved from execution " by amazingly clever planning, under perilous circumstances," by Heinz Baumeister of Dortmund and Dr. Eugen Kogon of Vienna, who are still inmates of the camp.

7. Although the work of cleaning the camp had gone on busily for over a week before our visit, and conditions must therefore have been improved considerably, our immediate and continuing impression was of intense general squalor; the odour of dissolution and disease still pervaded the entire place. One of the first of a number of huts that we entered was one of the best: it was divided into small rooms with cement floor and windows, four of which had been used, the American authorities informed us, as a brothel to which the higher-grade prisoners—those employed in various supervisory jobs, with extra rations and other privileges—were allowed to resort for

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twenty minutes at a time. (In general, Buchenwald Camp was for men and boys only; the women in this brothel were prisoners from other camps, induced by threats and promises of better treatment, to become prostitutes, but subsequently killed. When the Americans arrived, fifteen women were found in this brothel. They were transferred to the care of the Burgomaster of Weimar.) This hut was one of those now used as transit hospitals for some of the worst cases of malnutrition. Many were unable to speak: they lay in a semi-coma, or following us with their eyes. Others spoke freely, displaying sores and severe scars and bruises which could have been caused by kicks and blows. They lay on the floor on and under quilts. All of them were in a state of extreme emaciation. We were told by the U.S. authorities that, since their arrival, the number of deaths had been reduced from about a hundred per day to 35 on the day before our visit. The usual clothing was a ragged shirt, vest or cotton jacket, beneath which protruded thighs no thicker than normal wrists. One half-naked skeleton, tottering painfully along the passage as though on stilts, drew himself up when he saw our party, smiled, and saluted. The medical members of our Delegation expressed the opinion that a percentage of them could not be expected to survive, even with the treatment they were now receiving, and that a larger percentage, though they might survive, would probably suffer sickness and disablement for the rest of their lives. Among those in this hut were several writers and students, and one member of the French *Deuxième Bureau* captured in Warsaw.

8. The ordinary huts that we saw were lined on each side with four tiers of wooden shelves, supported and divided by upright struts. In each of the small open cubicles thus formed, about six feet in depth, four feet in width, and two feet in height, five or six men had to sleep. Even in their wasted condition, there was room for them to lie in one position only, on their sides. Several of them demonstrated to us how this had been done. For bedclothes they had such rags as they could collect. Heaps of these rags were being burned in various parts of the camp; the huts were still verminous.

9. There had been similar overcrowding in Block 61, which had been used as a rough hospital, chiefly for those suffering from tuberculosis or dysentery. This hut was about 80 ft. long by 24 ft. wide; estimates of its normal sick population varied from 700 to 1,300. Four, five, or six men, including those who had undergone operations (performed without anaesthetics by prisoner doctors on a crude operating-table at one end of the hut, in full view of the other patients), had regularly to lie in each of the small shelf cubicles. Here, too, there were no mattresses. The excreta of the dysentery patients dripped down from tier to tier. If the living were strong enough, they pushed the dead out into the gangway. Each night the dead were thrown into a small annexe at one end of the hut, and each morning collected and taken in carts to the crematorium or, if required as specimens, to the pathological laboratory of the Nazi doctors.

10. Many of the ordinary prisoners worked in a large munition factory near the camp or in the quarries; these were able to obtain more than the basic ration of a bowl of watery soup and a chunk of dry bread each day. Only those possessing the oblong metal disc marked "Essmarke KLB" were entitled to draw rations. We saw paper camp money which prisoners could earn by work and spend in the canteen. Some whom we spoke to paid tribute to the precision with which the Royal Air Force had bombed the factory (killing, it was said, about 200 Nazis, 400 forced workers, and 150 Nazi women resident near the camp, including the Camp Commandant's wife and daughter). Children, like adults, were made to work eight or more hours a day, seven days a week. We were told that there were some 800 children

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still in the camp. One 14-year-old boy, Abraham Kirchenblat, originally of Radom, Poland, impressed members of our party as an intelligent and reliable witness; he stated that he had seen his 18-year-old brother shot dead and his parents taken away, he believed for cremation: he never saw them again.

11. The mortuary block consisted of two floors, ground floor and basement. Access to the basement was by a steep stone staircase or by a vertical chute below a trap-door, down either of which, we were told, refractory or useless prisoners would be precipitated for execution. Hanging appears to have been the regular method of killing. In the yard, near a pile of white ashes, there was a gibbet; in the basement we saw strong hooks, at a height of about 8 ft. from the floor, and another gibbet. We were informed that there had been more than forty hooks, most of which Nazis had removed hurriedly before leaving. We were shown a heavy wooden club, about 2 ft. long, which was said to have been used for knocking out any who died slowly; it was stained with blood. The bodies were transported from this basement to the ground-floor crematorium in a large electric lift (similar to those used for stretcher-cases in hospitals). To the yard outside the crematorium came the carts, packed closely with the ordinary corpses from the dysentery and other huts, mostly stripped even of the meagre striped blue-and-white suits which were the normal camp clothing. We examined the last of these cart-loads that remained, awaiting the reverent individual burial which, on General Eisenhower's personal order, the American authorities have obliged the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to provide with their own hands. The bodies were beginning to decompose, but none that we could see bore the marks of violent death; all appeared, from their state of extreme emaciation, to have died of hunger or of disease. In the crematorium was a row of capacious arched ovens, each still containing calcined ribs, skulls, and spinal columns. The prisoner in charge of putting the bodies into the ovens had one of the privileged jobs, since it carried with it the advantage of a private room, with furniture and lace curtains, adjoining the crematorium. He told us that he was a Communist from Berlin, aged 30, named Kurt Faulhaber. He had been in the camp for ten years, but had obtained this job only last January. He stated that two other German prisoners had been mainly engaged in hanging the condemned. Their names were Heinrode (of Hamburg) and Josef Müller (of Dortmund). They had been taken away by the Nazis when they left. No Jews, we were told, would ever have been allotted these special tasks.

12. We were told of scientific experiments, such as the infecting of prisoners with typhus in order to obtain serum from them, by the camp's Nazi doctors; but obtained no direct and unchallengeable evidence of this. We saw a laboratory with a large number of glass jars containing preserved specimens of human organs. The walls of the laboratory and other medical rooms were decorated with death-masks of, we were told, the "more interesting" prisoners—many with features of remarkable nobility and refinement. It was alleged that various experiments in sterilisation had been practised on Jews. Two of our number were taken to the bed (in the improvised American hospital) of a Polish Jew, Number 23397, aged 29, who had been operated on in this way; they saw the scars of the operation, and confirm that the left testicle had been removed. Other subjects of the operation were said to have died; and we were assured that the policy of exterminating Jews had long superseded that of castrating them. We were told that Frau Koch, the wife of the German Commandant, collected articles made of human skin. We obtained pieces of hide which have since been identified by Sir Bernard Spilsbury as being human skin. One of these pieces clearly formed part of a lampshade.

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13. One of the statements made to us most frequently by prisoners was that conditions in other camps, particularly those in Eastern Europe, were far worse than at Buchenwald. The worst camp of all was said by many to be at Auschwitz; these men all insisted on showing us their Auschwitz camp numbers, tattooed in blue on their left forearms. One 19-year-old youth, Joseph Berman, Latvian-born but English-educated, had been in several camps; in one, he had suffered the loss of a forefinger when a Nazi, annoyed by his indolence at work, had pushed his hand into a machine.

14. Despite the desperate physical condition of many of the prisoners, and their long years of incarceration, there were signs of mental as well as physical recovery. Vivid slogans of greeting to the liberating Armies, in English and many other languages, were being painted on the outside of the huts. New notice-boards bore news-sheets and well-designed instructional and democratic propaganda messages, mostly in German. Near the entrance to the camp was a life-size effigy of Hitler hanging from a gibbet, with the superscription in German:—" Hitler must die that Germany may live! "

It would be impossible to praise too highly the selfless exertions of the 120th Evacuation Hospital Unit, under the command of Colonel William E. Williams (in charge of medical services), assisted by Major L. C. Schmuhl (in charge of sanitary services). We saw blood transfusion in process, and learned that glucose injections were being given and that carefully chosen diets were supplied to prisoners incapable of digesting normal food.

15. In preparing this report, we have endeavoured to write with restraint and objectivity, and to avoid obtruding personal reactions or emotional comments. We would conclude, however, by stating that it is our considered and unanimous opinion, on the evidence available to us, that a policy of steady starvation and inhuman brutality was carried out at Buchenwald for a long period of time; and that such camps as this mark the lowest point of degradation to which humanity has yet descended. The memory of what we saw and heard at Buchenwald will haunt us ineffaceably for many years.

(Signed) STANHOPE.
ADDISON.
TOM WICKHAM.
ARCHIBALD R. J. SOUTHBY.
MAVIS TATE.
NESS EDWARDS.
S. SYDNEY SILVERMAN.
GRAHAM WHITE.
HENRY MORRIS-JONES.
TOM DRIBERG.

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STAFF EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

DESCRIPTION OF ATTACHED DOCUMENT (Under following headings)

Title and Nature: Buchenwald Camp - The Report of a Parliamentary Delegation.

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If not English, is translation attached: Yes ( ) No ( )

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CONCENTRATION CAMPS (1)(2);

NECESSARY PROCESSING TO PUT IN EVIDENTIARY FORM; LEADS:

This is official document of British Government.

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT POINTS (with page references):

1. Eye witness account by British Parliamentary Delegation of physical conditions at Buchenwald Camp 21 April 1945. (5 printed pages). Squalor, odour of dissolution and disease described. Description of mortuary block, gibbet and hooks, and skeletons in ovens. Evidence and interviews on scientific experiments on bodies. Size of huts indicated overcrowding.

2. Delegation concludes unanimously that evidence showed that a policy of steady starvation and inhuman brutality was carried out at Buchenwald for a long period of time.

3. Inmates forced to work in munitions factories and quarries near camp. After 1940 men and youths imported for forced labor from various occupied countries. (pp. 4-5)

Note: This document is British counterpart of the report of U.S.Congressional Delegation who visited German concentration camps in April.

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Exhibit RE 351
Filed Jan 30, 1946
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